THE YELLOW BITTERN
CLAN FALVEY—
KING AND HERMIT

DANIEL CORKERY.

Irene Dwen Andrews
April 1923

The Yellow Bittern and Other Plays

To

JOHN O'TOOLE

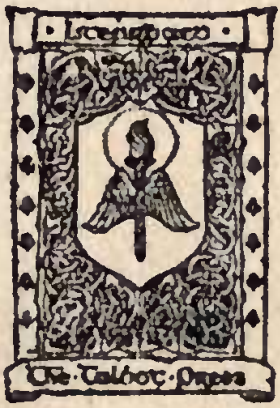
Thanking him for
a thousand kindnesses

The Yellow Bittern

and Other Plays

BY

DANIEL CORKERY



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PREFACE

THE modern stage direction, the descriptive stage direction (the phrase is a contradiction in terms), as it is called, is it worth while? For some reviewers, if we are to believe them, these page-long "directions" make a drama as interesting as a novel: one thinks of the sun being brought at last to shine like the moon! For others they create atmosphere. But Maeterlinck knows a way of doing so that is far more effective, and so did Shakespeare:—

> "This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air
> Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
> Unto our gentle senses——"

Here place and feeling are important things, but the most important thing is that it is Duncan who speaks in this way of Macbeth's castle, while in the passage:—

> "Light thickens and the crow
> Makes wing to the rooky wood——"

the most important thing is that it is Macbeth who speaks. And yet critics defend the new-

style stage directions by pointing out that modern drama relies but little on external action, and much on the conflicts that rage within the mind, not seeing apparently that atmosphere has been always native to such plays, while it has never had any place at all in plays of external action, in melodrama, to wit. If there be any class of play that can do without such stage directions, it is the drama that deals with conflicts in the mind ; if any class of play need them, it is the melodrama. In a good play we sink into the massed mind of the people in it, and we feel as that mind feels ; through it we breathe the atmosphere that is in the play. Are we to continue to do this, or, instead, are we to watch those people struggle with one another, and at last pass by, against sunsets and castle walls, of which an alien intelligence, the writer's intelligence, has made us free ?

There is still a further defence of them. They give us the points the author impresses on his actors, they are the next best thing to his very voice itself. If we cannot get to see the actors he has put through their parts, then let us have the directions he gave them. This defence omits an important consideration : the theatre audience do not receive

the author's directions, they do not hear his voice. They get his ideas as interpreted by his actors—a very different thing. For, just imagine a playwright in the midst of his troup. He is choked with ideas, he is all words; the gestures he invents are often impossible, his inflections do not carry meaning, his colours will not stand his own lighting scheme. I can see his actors grouped about him: they are wondering at his simplicity—nay, more, they are seeing in himself the reason of the many faults they, sapient folk, have already discovered in his play. But they try to understand him, to pick out of his mist of words the one word they, in their art, can apply—the one gesture they can use, the one scheme that will hold together—and it is only what they so convey that the audience receive. So that it is a mistake to think that stage directions, however elaborate and meticulous, can give us the play as the author "puts it on." Neither in content nor form will the reader of a play ever receive it as the people in the theatre receive it. A book is a book, and a stage is a stage.

The objection to such descriptive directions may be inferred from what has been written:

willy-nilly they bring the author between us and his play. At the opening of Hauptmann's very great play, *Die Weber*, there are two close-printed pages of description. They build up a fine scene, and the people enter, and we can see them. But I cannot get rid of Hauptmann in it—and I await the play to begin. A playwright cannot build up a scene and people it without being seen. He is as surely to be found in his page of words as Rembrandt in his smallest sketch. Only the utterly conventional is ever quite impersonal. The directions in drama should not differ from those in music—I should often like to be able to use such words as *crescendo* and *rallentando*—and again like those in music they should be implied in the words of the characters ; if lost they should be capable of being restored by a skilful editor, as would the directions in a piece of music—no one dreaming of scientific precision in such matters. A work of art must be self-centred, free.

And the art of the actor must equally be free. I find it written of Hauptmann's stage directions :—"Such directions obviously tax the mimetic art of the stage to the very verge of its power. Thus, by the precision of his

directions, both for the scenery and the persons of each play, and by unmistakable indications of gesture and expression at all decisive moments of dramatic action, Hauptmann has placed within narrow limits the activity of both stage manager and actor. He alone is the creator of his drama, and no factitiousness is allowed to obscure its final aim, the creation of living men." The stage manager and actor will break through these "narrow limits," the wind of the spirit puffing them up. As artists engaged in creating a work of art that will be free, they cannot help doing so. Hauptmann will often suffer through their artistry, occasionally he will rejoice for it. Factitiousness there must be in drama, as in music. It is curious to reflect that this new style of stage direction, the "narrow limits" style, has come upon the world at the very time we were seeking a way of mounting drama that should have something of vision and breadth in it.

II

The plays I gather into this book were written quite without reference to one another, each, a thing in itself, occupying the whole

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II

The plays I gather into this book were written quite without reference to one another, each, a thing in itself, occupying the whole

of my mind while I was making it. Yet now when I bring them together I am reminded of what Keating said three hundred years ago: "Ireland is a little world in itself." He was right. He is right. And if there be any illumination of this small world in my book, it would have been increased by just a little if the censor had not refused permission —months and months after the ending of the war—to print a little play I had intended for it, a little play dealing with the Rising in Dublin in '16. For me, at all events, there is thus a gap in this book. But then this little world in itself has always known and indeed loved books with gaps in them. Did not Egan O'Rahilly two hundred years ago speak of other tidings he might have put into his songs, only he dared not :—

"'S fios eile na cuirfead im laoidhthibh le fior-uamhan."

And for hundreds and hundreds of years has there ever been an Irish poet who might not have said the same—except, of course, the few among them who turned their backs on their own people? This gap, then, that I must leave in this book, le fior-uamhan, is in itself illuminative of Irish history—of this much at least I am certain.

KING AND HERMIT

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

PERSONS

Manus	- -	*An aged king*
Colman	- -	*An aged hermit*
Rory	- - -	*A boy, the gilly of the hermit*
Carbery	- -	*Courtiers*
Conan	- - -	
Brassil	- -	

TIME

Early Christian Ireland

SCENE

A forest glade; beneath the trees a hut, at the door a fallen tree trunk. Colman *comes from the hut; he is perturbed in manner*

KING AND HERMIT

A Play in One Act

Col. (*calling in an uncertain way*). Rory! . . . Rory! Where are you? (*He peers through the trees.*) A sleep to fall on me in the bright morning. I am ashamed! And a dream . . . full of music—trumpets and cymbals, and keening women sitting by a wall, hooded—and then all the to-and-fro hurly-burly of the market place and the ford and the hosting—braggarts throwing their horses sidelong at one another, and then the horses' hoofs in the air! . . . A dream! A dream! out of the old time . . . (*Calling out*) Rory! . . . Rory! . . . A dream, and yet I must cry for Rory to come and shut the door upon the wide world of it! (*He calls out*) Rory! . . . This wood this autumn morning is a silent world, dewy and soft and silent, and my call should reach him in the farthest glade . . . Rory!

Rory (*at a distance*). Here, Colman, here!

Col. (*starting*). Ah! the music in his

throat! Or does my dream open out the beauty of the world for me like a book? (*Calling*) Come, Rory! Come!

Rory (*nearer*). Coming, Colman, coming!

Col. (*looking through trees*). More brosna, more brosna—what we have now will bring us into the sunshine of April.

[Rory *enters with a large beart of brosna on his shoulders.*

Rory (*speaking brightly, as on equal terms with* Colman). I thought it well to gather it in the morning and I fresh and strong. April, you said?—swallows and April, they go together?

Col. Yes.

Rory. It is a long stretch from Samhain to April; and larch is a quick wood for burning. 'Tis a big heap will hold out a winter's day.

Col. But one can count the days too often.

Rory (*looking at him, not sure of his meaning*). Yes; but you have a meaning of your own?

Col. Oh, I mean . . . scarcely anything. . . . You would like to go back now to your father's country?

Rory (*surprised*). Now! Has my father

sent for me? I saw no one in the wood; no horseman at all.

Col. But you have not answered me.

Rory. I am taking your question in; you have often told me I must learn to do so, and not to answer like a bird you'd whistle to——

Col. Leave it alone—the question. I do not want to know; and no one has sent for you. I think you are getting too wise from our gossiping in the long mornings; you in bed questioning me, and I moving about, warming the milk and cutting the rosy apples, like a poor, foolish old man.

Rory. Oh, you did not see me leave the house this morning; and I going out you were having a fine sleep in the sunshine.

Col. Ah, you will not let me forget it. I am getting old, Rory—too old to foster you much longer, to foster you as would be right.

Rory. Why, it is only now I am beginning to understand what you would teach me.

Col. (*looking at him*). Ah! you are ripening, ripening. Rory, sit here a moment, here beside me. (*He sits down.*) Leave the brosna there.

Rory. Why, I will. (*He seats himself at* Colman's *knees.*) You have a story for me;

I know it by the way you looked at me. . . . Joseph sold his brethren for a mess of pottage . . . that's a good story . . . and . . .

Col. But no, Rory, he did not. . . .

Rory. That's the way I have it; maybe I learned it wrong, and I very young.

Col. Yes. [*There is a silence.*

Rory. Begin now.

[Colman *makes no answer.*

Rory. Begin, Colman.

[Colman *remains shut up in his thoughts.*

Rory. If you don't begin . . . but, of course, I'm not impatient. . . .

Col. It is hard to begin this story. . . .

Rory. Then it is a new story: it is easy to begin an old story.

Col. Yes. A long time ago there were two boys growing up together——

Rory (*quietly*). Their names were Colman and Rory——

Col. Now, now, listen to me. . . . Growing up together, two boys, one of them brown and strong and hard, and the other pale and black and thin. . . .

[Rory *glances at* Colman.

Rory. Oh, yes . . . the story of Colman and Rory. . . . I am strong and hard. . . .

Col. Don't speak again, not this morning.

Rory (*feeling the earnestness in the old man's voice*). If I am doing wrong . . .

Col. No, no; but I have not the story by heart.

Rory. Take it slowly, then. I will be quiet. There were two boys, you said, one brown and strong and hard, like a pine tree; the other pale and thin and black, like . . . like a little birch. . . . . Well?

Col. And they were brothers. . . .

Rory. Ah! and always together?

Col. (*earnestly*). They seemed to have but one soul in them.

Rory (*pondering it*). Now!

Col. They had a shining black horse of their own, and whenever they rode him down the heathery hills to the sea it was the strong brown lad held the reins, for no one could trust the other to keep the horse's hoofs from sliding on the rocks and on the sun-dried grass between the rocks. . . .

Rory. The dark boy sitting behind him?

Col. Clasping him behind. Together they hurled on the green before their father's brugh; but when the King's College of Bards came on a visit to their father's house, the strong lad woke the other from his

sleep: "Listen," he whispered to him, "do not come out on the green to-morrow; do not come out the day after to-morrow; do not come out any day until the poets are gone, for fear they may put it into a verse that our father has two sons, just as he has two hands—one right, the other left."

Rory. That was a hard saying——

Col. Yes, it was cruel, and the little lad remembered it and turned it over in his mind, over and over.

Rory. Maybe the strong lad, the pine-tree fellow, had no luck at the hurling for saying it?

Col. Listen, he always had luck. But in spite of many words like that passing between them they lived together very happily. At nightfall they would sit on the one stone by their father's threshold singing *O Deus Ego Amo Te*, and the two voices would blend into one voice, and go far away over the woods and the quiet waters.

Rory. I have often thought of it.

Col. (*surprised*). I do not understand.

Rory. When you and I sit here at nightfall singing *O Deus Ego Amo Te*, I often think within me: Now, maybe some one is

listening, some one beyond the three brooks, beyond the alder trees and the sloes.

Col. Yes, yes, your thoughts would follow the music. Well, at last they named the elder lad the Tanist. . . .

Rory. Yes, because he was strong and hard, and yet Cuchulain was gentle and slight. . . .

Col. But was it not right to do so? Look, there's an old oak tree half against the rock. . . .

[*He stretches his hand, and* Rory's *eyes look into the distance.*

Rory. With the strong leaves of gold?

Col. Yes, with the strong leaves of gold. It is a great, sturdy tree. Now, close to it on the right . . .. the little one . . .

Rory. With the silver bark?

Col. With the silver bark.

Rory. That is another oak, a sapling.

Col. And then, the next tree again?

Rory. With the scales of a dragon; oh, look at them!

Col. Why, yes! And that is . . .?

Rory. That is a poplar. I know all the trees.

Col. Now, when that great old oak tree falls, will yon poplar tree, with that white,

soft timber of his under the scaly bark, take his place?

Rory. Ah, no!

Col. No?

Rory. He hasn't it in him to be king.

Col. And the frail and gentle boy hadn't it in him to be king.

Rory. But Cuchulain, when he was young, was frail and shy. . . .

Col. Yes, but maybe he did not know it: he had no brother to tell him of it.

Rory. Oh!

Col. Well, no sooner did Tanist know that he was to be king than he grew proud and stern; he struck his brother; he would bow him to his will.

Rory. Then maybe the young lad's spirit blazed up and he . . .

Col. No; but he went quietly away into the woods.

Rory. Far away?

Col. Not at first; but he grew to love the woods, their whispering, their silent waters, the slopes of delicate little blossoms, now purple, now gold, the swift birds—he spoke to them, and they never hurt him at all; he loved to have the woods folded around him like a great rich mantle, full of different

colours, with birds winging in it, and sun-lit deer and golden fruit and running streams. Yes, and he drew deeper and deeper into them, and left no trace behind him. And little by little peace came to him; and at last, of a very still, a very long, quiet summer evening, after kneeling for hours and hours with his shoulder leant against a rock, he found that he could pray for his brother, the king, could pray that he might lead his people in truth and justice, that he should not be unmerciful in war, nor sullen in enmity, but forgiving and generous and forbearing, not too strong, too hard, too proud.

Rory (*rising, gazes at the* Hermit, *who is looking afar, and speaks slowly*). And the king's name was Manus!

Col. (*startled, rises*). Rory! What name have you said? Where did you hear it? Who was it told you?

Rory. You, Colman.

Col. No, no. I never spoke that name; you cannot say I did. . . .

Rory. You say it in your sleep, over and over again.

Col. (*softly*). Rory! Rory!

[*He seats himself. A pause.*

Rory. And Poplar's name. . . .

Col. You know it?

Rory. Poplar's name was Colman, I think. . . . And that is your story?

Col. Yes.

Rory. But you said my father has sent no messenger for me: the woods are still.

Col. No one has come for you.

Rory. Why, then, are you so sad? Look at this great load of brosna. We will have great fires of it in the winter nights. The birds will beat against the door; we will hear the wild boars rushing by. . . .

Col. Take it up and carry it to the stack.

Rory. But your story has no end. If the king at the end of it . . .

[*He bends to lift the brosna. A hunting horn is heard from far away.*

Rory (*surprised; he speaks in a whisper*). What is that?

Col. (*troubled*). Hush, hush!

[*The horn sounds.*

Rory. Do you hear it?

Col. Hush, Rory, hush!

[*The horn sounds again.*

Rory. Listen! again, nearer!

[*The horn sounds much nearer.*

Col. (*very disturbed*). In, Rory, in! Come, come. [*The horn is heard nearer.*

Rory. Let me stay, let me stay.

[*The horn is heard still nearer.*

Col. Come, angel, give me your hand; come.

Rory (*gazing intently through trees*). Oh, see, look! look!

Col. These are hunters—wild, passionate men; let them go by.

Rory. Look! There's a flame among the trees; it flies like an arrow; 'tis a fawn—with a hundred legs—or wings. Wings! Colman—on fire and spreading and lifting it—now! now! 'Tis an angel's wing!—it beats up against the sky, shining. (*He screams as if astonished.*) Colman, Colman!

[*He falls fainting into the* Hermit's *arms.*

Col. Child, child, I see no light or wings, but I am more astray than you. There were wings around my dreaming, and music . . . and music. . . .

[*The horn sounds suddenly quite near.* Colman *lifts* Rory *into his arms, and bears him hurriedly into the hut. After a moment or two,* Carbery, Conan, *and* Brassil *leap in upon the clearing: they are surprised to find the place empty of the fawn they pursued. The*

King *follows after them; he, however, is rapt in thought, and walks as if in a dream.*

King. Carbery, my spirit is overborne.

Carb. My Lord King, you mistake.

King. It was a vision, Carbery, it was a vision. And I remember the darkness that fell on me this morning as I stood on my threshold and saw my youths hurling on the green, and saw the white arms of my maidens among the apple boughs. Indeed, I looked upon them as one who goes in exile to Alban, beyond the sea of Moyle.

Carb. In truth, my Lord King, it was a lime-white fawn broken newly from a dark ivy covert, like a ferret from a hunter's bag——

King. You, Conan, what do you say?

Con. It was a blossom-white fawn, my Lord King. Our dogs lost the track of the boar at the meeting-place of the three brooks, and we followed the cries of the dogs.

King (*turning to* Brassil). What did you see?

Bras. A fawn, my Lord, as white as snow-time.

King. Where, then, did it vanish? I

saw a white light, a crown, and floating wings.

Con. (*stepping from his place*). It sprang through this clearing at a bound, like a weaver's shuttle.

Bras. (*also stepping out*). No, it went no farther than this; in this place it sank on its knees, breathless.

Carb. (*with assurance*). It went into hiding in this place.

[Conan, *turning from them, notices the hut.*

Con. (*speaking very quietly*). Is not this a hermit's hut?

King. Ah! what do you say, Conan? Have you not said some holy word?

Con. This is a hermit's hut, my Lord King. [*The* King *is absorbed in thought.*

Carb. (*touching the* King *gently*). Conan thinks this is a hermit's hut.

King. I was forgetting. Do you know this place, Carbery?

Carb. We never reached so far before; the marshes guard it and the sally trees.

King. Would you seek out where we are, Conan?

[Conan *knocks at the door of the hut:* Colman *comes out.*

Col. God and Mary be with ye all.

Courtiers. And with you, father.

Con. We are lost in our reckoning; the King would have direction from you.

Col. (*musing*). The King would have direction from me.

Carb. Why do you not bow before the King?

Col. King! who is King?

King (*to* Carbery). Gently. (*To* Colman) Father Hermit, I am the King.

Col. (*to* Carbery). Why should I bow before the King?

Carb. He is our lantern in the night.

Col. He leads you?

Carb. He leads us.

Col. In the hunt?

Carb. In the hunt.

Col. In the merciless war?

Carb. In the triumph of the war!

Col. In the bellowing cattle raid, in the rout?

Carb. In the cattle raid, the rout, the battle!

Col. And who leads you in the ways of righteousness, and humility, and peace, and love? [Carbery *hesitates.*

Con. We are the subjects of the King, and we bow to him.

Col. (*turning towards a great tree, with majesty*). Bow down, O forest tree, for I am over you in all things. (*A pause.*) It does not bow. . . . I have no axe.

Con. (*roughly*). You had better bow yourself down.

King. Gently! Gently! Father Hermit, the tree knows you not.

Col. It ought to know me; forty years I have slept beneath its branches; but my dog knows me. [*He turns towards the hut.*

King (*stopping him*). It is a senseless creature.

Col. Wherefore, it might surely bow to one of us.

King. He does not understand that he differs from you.

Col. (*to the* Courtiers). You understand how you differ from him? (*indicating the* King). (*The* Courtiers *look confused.*) But it may be you are right. Rory, Rory! Come, Rory, come!

Rory (*entering*). Who are these men?

Con. Men!

Col. Bow down, Rory, before your master.

Rory. What's "bow down before your master"?

Col. Oh! it is the opening phrase in the annals of the wars.

Rory. But what is it?

[*The* King *signals to* Brassil, *who bows and kneels before him.*

Col. (*to* King, *hastily*). Are you not afraid? (*He lifts* Brassil *up.*) (*To* Rory.) Have you learned what it is?

Rory. Oh, yes.

[Rory *bows all round vigorously and indiscriminately.*

Col. (*assuming dignity, and speaking commandingly*). Bow down before me, your master!

Rory (*in amazement*). Colman! Colman!

Col. (*as before*). Bow! Bow!

Rory (*looks for a moment perplexed and sad, then seeing* Colman *relaxing, runs and flings himself in his arms*). Oh, don't speak like one who is wicked. Don't speak like a strong king!

[*He buries his face in* Colman's *bosom. A moment's silence.*

Carb. O King, we have journeyed into a strange land: their teaching is of the squirrels and the dancing leaves and the wild foxes and the leverets. The eyes of this old man are whitening; he is dulled

with age and with revolving the same thoughts. What he knows is nothing.

Rory (*suddenly*). He knows everything—when the swallows go and when the starlings come; when the moon is to sink in the waters and when it is time for it to go sloping down between the low hills on the right. I have questioned him. . . .

Con. (*stepping forward*). King!

Rory. And ask him about God, and the Son of Man, and the Three Marys, and the souls that desire to be dissolved. . . .

Con. King, give us leave!

[*The* King *looks at* Colman.

Col. (*answering the look*). What is your will?

Con. (*roughly*). Kneel before your King.

King (*having checked* Conan *with a gesture, to* Rory). No one but you two live here?

Rory. No one ever comes.

King. There is always peace?

Rory. What is peace?

Col. Only the souls that wish to be dissolved are filled with it. Who else? Who else?

King. But the steaming heat, the continuous roar, the high heart of war?

Col. Rory scattering grain and the sparrows quarrelling about his feet.

King. The plunging horses, the crashing chariots?

Col. Rory gathering brosna from the central larches.

King. The merry tongues, the sharp jesting? . . . and the battle over!

Col. Rory's arguments; for all things are relative.

King. The throng of poets, the singing harps, the joy of life!

Col. When only the tops of the woods burn in the reddening sun, Rory and I sitting among the warm rocks watching the bats above the pool, swooping and whirring. . . . I think we know. . . .

King. Ah! speak on! speak on! I would drink long drinks of peace.

Col. The day's fulfilment, the moon quiet in the sky, the stars gathering from far away, slowly, slowly . . . and the last breeze lingering in the reeds. . . .

King (*turning to his men*). I will go back to my brugh no more. When we are sent a vision, like a child in its white innocence, let us yield it our hand.

Con. Ah, but King! remember the day

you broke the battle on high-vaunting Olioll, Lord of the Land of the Yews: you sat at feasting in the palace feast-hall, pouring the mead and the strong wine, and the horse-boys crowded outside, grooming the steaming horses: you shouted their names, every one of them—Roncu! Maylcron! Ross! Malachy! —I can hear you, see you—and they all answered with Manus! Manus! Manus!

[Rory *starts, and shrinks into the shelter of the* Hermit.

Con. And Lewy sprang to his harp-stool with a new song bursting from his lips, like the seeds from a pomegranate.

Bras. And we all shouted three great shouts when the song ended with Manus! Manus! Manus!

King. I will return no more.

Carb. And recall the day you took the battle spoil in Drumsaulinn.

King. I remember it: Caoilte, the son of Deena, came to that fighting place with the colour of sunshine in his face, and when the day was fought, we left him lying on the moss with his cheeks coloured as old beech trunks are; I remember it.

Con. But recall, O my Lord King, your hosting against the Clan Morna.

King. Ah, Conan, you always said the untimely word. It is the memory of that day darkened on me when I saw my youths hurling on the green in the sunshine this morning, and thought of one especial man I had seen die; for when that day of dreadful battle was won we hastened from the clutch of the forest and found the highway in the setting sun as bright as quarry stone.

Carb. I see it again, fronting up the hill.

King. A lengthy figure, with bold and impudent strides, came down that shining way.

Con. I remember him not.

Carb. I remember him.

King. Our pipers broke when he flung his cloak apart: his face and limbs were shrunken and thin and . . .

Con. Now, I remember. (*With anguish*) O King, dismiss him from your mind!

King. They rushed aside, and the pipes groaned with their remaining breaths.

Con. (*as before, with anguish*). O King, dismiss him from your mind.

King (*very excited*). I see him now and the shadow of his cloak dancing in the dust like an evil spirit.

Carb. No more! No more!

King. My foot soldiers rushed from him through briers and thorns; my charioteers went into confusion; the wheels jammed on them, the horses reared, the poles crashed and splintered and flew.

Con. Spare us, O King!

King (*in a terrible voice*). My guards were trampled into blood.

Carb. O King, no more!

King. They cursed and died.

[*A slight pause.*

Col. Who was he, that great, single warrior?

King (*in a changed voice*). No warrior, but one smitten by the hand of God; he moved along the road like a drift of autumn leaves, torn and decayed, and when I slew him there was but little blood.

[*He covers his face.*

Col. O King, your story is clear, he was a leper; and though but a leper he broke your armies that broke the armies of the Clan Morna! O King, was it you who spoke of the pride of life?

King. I will return no more.

Carb. Your glory has but begun!

King. I will return no more. Let my

women sit by the wall, keening me; I am dead: the leper has clutched me!

Col. You are old and shattered. Take ye this. (*He unclasps the* King's *mantle and lets it fall;* Carbery *takes it up.*) And this. (Colman *unclasps the* King's *spear;* Brassil *takes it up.*) And this . . . we need them not. (Conan *takes up the dagger, which the* Hermit *has thrown to the ground.*)

King. Conan is Tanist, make Conan king.

Carb. Manus, I implore you. [*He kneels.*

Con. Manus, I kneel. [*He kneels.*

Bras. Manus, King! King! [*Kneels.*

King. No more, no more.

[*The* King *turns his back on them; goes a little way off, and kneels. The* Courtièrs *rise and make to go towards the* King, *but they are prevented by the* Hermit.

Col. Quiet! Disturb him no more; dark angels and bright angels come and go before his burning eyes: let him wrestle with them. Rory, go you with these bright lads.

Rory (*whispering, as if not certain of his own mind*). Do I want to go with them?

Col. Never a galley comes ashore, ragged with weeds, tawny, and broken from

battling for the riches of the sea, but another is ready to dip its new prow in the waves and loosen its sails to the alluring winds. Do not forget my words; long before you pass this way again the oak tree and the poplar tree will both have fallen asleep . . . after their long day.

[*The* Courtiers *make to go to the* King; Colman *comes between, and with great dignity waves them off; they turn to go; going,* Carbery *suddenly winds the horn;* Colman *gazes earnestly at the kneeling* King, *who gives no sign; the* Courtiers *go, the horn grows fainter and fainter. After a silence:—*

Col. (*tenderly*). Manus!

[*The* King *turns, gazes at the* Hermit, *and recognises him for his brother.*

King (*to the* Hermit). Colman!

[*They embrace. As* Colman *leads* Manus *into his hut, the curtain descends.*

THE END

"King and Hermit" was first produced on 2nd December 1909, by the Cork Dramatic Society in the Dun, Cork, with the following cast:—

Manus	- - -	*Eugene O'Shea*
Colman	- - -	*Daniel Harrington*
Rory	- - - -	*Ernest O'Shea*
Carbery	- - -	*P. Kenefick*
Conan	- - -	*C. B. Ronayne*
Brassil	- - -	*John Gilley*

CLAN FALVEY

CLAN FALVEY

"Ejected proprietors, whose names might be traced in the annals of the Four Masters or around the sculptured crosses of Clonmacnoise, might be found in abject poverty hanging around the land which had lately been their own, shrinking from servile labour as from an intolerable pollution, and still receiving a secret homage from their old tenants."—(Lecky: "History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century.")

Mo mhíle truagh, mo bhuaidhirt, mo bhrón,
An sceimhle ruaig ar n-uaisle ar feódhadh,
Gan slighe gan suadh gan suairceas sóghach,
Gan laoi gan duain gan cnuas gan ceól.
Is é do léig mé i milleadh i gceas,
Is é do thraoch mo chuisle ar fad,
Uaisle Gaedheal fa chruadh-smacht ghéar,
Ag cuaine an Bhéarla dhuibh i nglas.

SEAN UA TUAMA.

PERSONS

Sean O'Falvey	*An old man*
Hugh O'Falvey	*His two sons*
Donal O'Falvey	
Tadhg O'Dinneen	
The Shanachie of Iveragh	*A very old man*
Father Boland	
A Bell-ringer (off the Stage)	

TIME

Early in the Eighteenth Century

SCENE

Interior of a peasant's hut, very dilapidated and poor. Door and tiny window at back. Fire at right. Door leading to another room at left. The glow of the turf fire lights up one side of the room

The curtain on rising discovers **Sean** *and* **Donal** *poring over a huge old book—evidently in MS.*

CLAN FALVEY

A Play in One Act

Sean (*looking up*). The fire is low; put more brushwood on it.

Don. (*having risen and moved to fire*). There is but little left in the house: it is long since I gathered any of it.

[Donal *puts a little brushwood on the fire, and is just about to sit again at the book when he halts as if in thought.* Sean *bends again on the book.*

Don. We have read enough. I am tired, and yet I have done no work in the fields. Look! I think it has been dry for the last two hours—two hours, and we have not noticed it! The river is very high.

Sean (*without attending*). Yes, yes.

Don. (*turning from window*). I have helped you but little: I was thinking of our corn stooked in the inches and Hugh standing in the midst of it, very angry. I wish now I had taken my share of the work from him.

Sean (*still without attending*). "And Feardorcha wedded Nuala of the race of Greeks that came from Florence"—yes, that is

clear, but it gives no help in what follows. No help! There still stand that couple of meagre quatrains like a fence, and we baulk at them, day after day!

Don. Father, I dread Hugh's coming in, his face black with anger! What will he say to us? And how are we to answer him? I will take a fork and go down. The clouds are breaking; if the moon rises we could work for many hours.

Sean. "The Greeks that came from Florence."

Don. If I go out into the byre, and you busy yourself at the hearth, he may not be so sure of his anger.

Sean (half to himself). If Rory of the Wine Kegs and Rory of the Forest by the Sea be one and the same, then the broken chain is knit—knit!—and it reaches back (*he pauses*)—to that ancient Falvey who rescued the King of Cashel from the galley of Turgesius! Clan Falvey reaches back from us, poor, downtrodden people, in this hut to-night to that battle in the eastern sea — eight hundred dreadful years — O vision! [*He stares before him.*

Don. Father, put away the book: it disturbs you——

Sean. The broken chain is knit, and I rise up in my certainty and knowledge——

[*He rises up majestically and is about to gesture, when he suddenly controls himself and sits again.*

My son, you have been speaking? The weather has cleared?

Don. I have asked you to put the book back in its chest.

Sean. The book, the book! Always it is the book that is in fault.

Don. Even if the sodden fields and the river rising about them will not have angered my brother, you know, father, the first sight of the book will anger him, will madden him, as it always does. Let me take it.

Sean. Not so hasty, not so hasty, Donal: certain thoughts have come to me——

Don. Thought rising out of thought! There is no ending with you. You have kept me here when my place was in the fields.

Sean. An hour or two! You begrudge me an hour of your time.

Don. I grow soft with this loitering at the hearth. And to-day above all days, when the river threatens us again! My place was in the inches with Hugh.

Sean. You do not grow soft, but hard!

hard! Unravelling the tangles of this ancient book—it is work to test the spirit by—the spirit—not the poor framework of blood and bones. The strength of the Gael was in his spirit: when his limbs failed him and he slipped, the spirit still held its place, proud, proud! The men of Bristol could not reach to it. It is Hugh grows soft and mean-spirited, with his mind set on his uncertain harvests and his few famished beasts. As soon as he crosses that threshold of a night-time, this place becomes—becomes —what it is! Sit again, Donal: you put my thoughts from their discovery.

Don. I will not. I cannot. Hugh's anger will be upon us in a moment, and that does not grow soft. In a moment it will be about us like a sword, flashing and blinding us.

Sean. His anger passes!

Don. But our foreheads are hot after it, and our hands.

Sean. It may be, it may be. But, sit again, just a little while: I would show you how I reason these two Rorys into one.

Don. I could not bring my thoughts to it. Hugh is now quitting the fields; the night is falling. He will be lifting the latch before we are ready. That is what my

thoughts would settle on, not the two Rorys. He will find the book spread upon the table, and he will again cast it up to you that you bartered our hoardings for it and made a bad bargain. Neglect and sloth and bad luck crossed our threshold the night it came in. What shall we say when he says that? —Put the book away.

Sean. Will you anger me? Will you, too, turn against me?

Don. Shall we not have the long, dark winter for it? Keep it for November, December —it will brighten them, like music or flowers.

Sean. Have I a lease of life in me? Day after day we leave this secret poem as knotted as we found it.

Don. You will not untangle it to-night.

Sean. If my last day overtake me before we have unravelled it, I tell you, Donal, it is that will be in my mind and not repentance for the sins of my youth. I would go calmly into the land of death, with my mind cleansed and free.

Don. I only ask you to put it away till morning; we shall be keen and fresh.

Sean (*exclaiming*). Sean MacGarvey! Dead! Dead!—Over Connor hill I came in rain and storm, bringing this book home

with me after its long exile in the houses of ignorant men; hugging it close to me; like a child, it warmed my breast! And I swept on manfully through wind and rain, and I said, "Sean MacGarvey, how will you greet me when I show you what I have purchased for a few pounds from the hands of ignorant men?" I came to his house. I struck in, shouting his name. They looked at me. He was laid upon a table, dead! His poll was heavy upon it, and his eyes were turned in and dull.

Don. Yes, and Hugh counts that the first misfortune that followed the coming of the poem-book of the O'Falveys into the country of the O'Falveys! Do not speak of Sean Uasal MacGarvey this night.

Sean. If he were alive this night I would not be sitting here, sorrowing. His learned eye would make short work of those knotted syllables.

Don. But he is dead.

Sean. Dead! He is. They are all dead, the learned shanachies of Kerry. Tadhg O'Dinneen is not dead; but he spent his youth in rioting, and his wits are not clear. He blames his eyes; but it is not his eyes that are dull.

Don. But what shall we answer Hugh when he comes in from our sodden fields?

Sean (*recklessly*). Answer him as you did when he came in and found our finest beast gored to its death.

Don. Not to-night; the bitterness of weariness will be upon him, and that is the worst bitterness of all. When his heavy eyes look at us—oh, what shall we see in them but our wasted fields and the water upon them, lifting and moving our corn? I am afraid.

Sean. His fields! his corn! Let him cast himself into this poem-book of his fathers, and instead of these little fields, these little hillsides of Lissnagaun, he will have the broad lands of Desmond, and instead of this smoky hut, the castles of his fathers, strong and scornful of battle. Say that to him, Donal; you have said it before.

Don. I dare not, not to-night when the river threatens the dykes. If it break them!

Sean. It will not.

Don. He spoke of the tide, the wind, the moon.

Sean. A river is not the sea.

Don. He is knowledgeable of the tides.

Sean. He is not.

Don. The dykes are undermined, he says.

Sean. They will hold.

Don. Oh, if we had spent the score of guineas this book cost us on repairing them! What blinded us! What blinded us!

Sean. What!—You, you, Donal!

Don. It was for that we hoarded them. Can you blame me? If they fall, what then?

Sean. You speak his very words. I can trust no one. Never again lay your eyes upon it, the book of the O'Falveys! Go from me. You are not worthy of it. You would swap it for a field of corn. The poem-book of the O'Falveys for a sheaf of corn! Take a fork and go out—out to the drudgery—with your brother. (*To the book, as if* Donal *had gone out.*) My treasure, my treasure! My world in which I am lost and yet at home. My music, in which I grow young and strong and free! My ship, in which I escape from the crafty enemies that encompass me. My strong spear and shield of battle. My roof against the wind of the sea. My lamp! my lamp! My star, my sun. My hearth! Comrade and prince of conversation. My Spanish wine, my host, my board, feast and venison. Rose of merriment. Lily of refinement. Text of chivalry——

Don. Father, be calm. I have but said quietly what Hugh will say with roughness and passion.

Sean. How can you or he or any of the little people now walking the hills of Desmond know what it is to me, this book of my fathers' fathers! You cannot know, nor they. The old learning, the keenness, the vivacity, the hospitality, the sweet music, the Gael had lost them before you were born. I should not blame you. If only Sean MacGarvey were here with me this night! But you—all this that is left to me, you would swap it for a sheaf of corn—like Hugh.

Don. Forgive me; forgive me if I anger you. But I have done wrong—loitering here at the fire while he has been struggling with the river and the streams. Be quiet and gentle when he comes in. I ask you; he does not live in our world.

Sean. Yes, I will be quiet and gentle with him; but you have betrayed me: he has his own world, and this is a night of sorrow for him—my strong, rough, hardy boy. I do too often forget his sorrows——

Don. Yes—and the book——

Sean (*speaking right on*). I do too often

forget that neither song nor poem can free him from these sorrows. A wife with a child at the breast, that would be music and song for him: he has strong arms—but he is not wedded! I will be quiet for pity when he comes in.

Don. Let him say what he will. His anger will run from him in a rush of words. Let it do so. But we must first of all put the book back in its chest.

[*The old man rises and shuts the book, tying the various tapes which hold it together.*

Sean. Yes, yes, yes—to-morrow I will begin without you.

Don. Father, I think he is coming. Hasten. I will go out to the cows. It is raining again. [Donal *goes out.*

Sean (*as if he had only then noticed it*). It is a dark, sullen evening.

[*He busies himself at the fire;* Hugh *enters. He is tired and dispirited-looking. There is a moment of silence.*

Sean (*simply*). I am busy at the fire: it will not brighten. Donal is with the cattle.

Hugh (*smiling callously*). Which means that neither fire nor cattle have been tended

till now. You are a simple man. For all the books you read, you are a simple man.

Sean. Yes.

Hugh. A slow-witted, simple man. You cannot lie like other men. I am proud of such a father. You always get the worst prices at the fair. 'Tis no great wonder to me.

Sean. Yes. Yes. People have fooled me once or twice. It did them no good that I could see.

Hugh. No good whatever—when you so easily forgot it. Do you hear that?

Sean. I do not hear anything.

Hugh. Perhaps it is in my mind I hear it —the back stream leaping on the rocks.

Sean. Yes. You have been listening to it all day.

Hugh. So I have, indeed. But it is the river will sweep our harvest from us, not the back stream. But why should I complain?

Sean. Our corn is in danger?

Hugh. It is—in danger of death by drowning. [*A silence.*

Hugh. Are there no dry sods in the house?

Sean. These are all that are left. The new sods are still worse.

Hugh. I was listening all day to the stream, and now I can hear the sods hissing. But I should laugh at it: it is the luck of the O'Falveys!

Sean. I will call Donal in. You two could talk together.

Hugh. I will call him myself. Donal!—In, lad, in. The fire will not redden. It doesn't take to us. We are strangers to it. [Donal *enters.* Oh, I need not have called so loud.

Don. No; the white cow is sick. I was coming in to tell you.

Hugh. Great and cheerful news! But everything is sick. The cows are taking the murrain. Our grass will not last till Christmas. It is black and thin. The sheep are scabby, and getting worse. Everything is sick on us, except one thing—the poem-book of the O'Falveys! That is not sick. Sick things do not strangle and destroy; and the poem-book of the O'Falveys—strangles and—sometimes I think I hear it laughing at us. Its sway is upon our house.

Sean. If you opened it at any page you would find yourself answered.

Hugh. Coming up, I could swear I heard

it laughing. Why, then, I said, I'll laugh too. On a dark, wet night like this there is nothing lovelier to think about than—a house full of laughter! Ha! the wind is rising too.

Don. I thought the night would clear and that the three of us could go to the inches.

Hugh. You, little brother! If I went to France and stood in with Liam Falvey, the dainty ensign in Dillon's—how they would laugh at me for a boor! Or if I took to sailoring in Sylvie Mahony's boat—how his dandy Spaniards would laugh! We must know our place, little brother: to me, the drudgery of the fields; to you, the learning of the schools.

Sean. You do not encourage him to work——

Don. Father!

Hugh. 'Tis little matter to us now, a field of corn. The old times are gone. We were thrifty once, and a field of corn was of value. Whatever corn we grow now it goes to fatten the drunken, wandering poets and schoolmasters of Munster! Why should we wear out our lives for them? Let Slieve Luachra and Slieve Mish fatten them! That's a strong wind now. Who knows but it will

blow another of them up the haggart to us—Donncadh Ruadh with his: "On this house a blessing, house of hospitality, house of learning!" Munster knows of us! They come to us from all ends of it. But if any of them slouch in on us to-night, why, 'tis I will welcome them and clear a space at the hearth! "Donnchadh Ruadh, tell us of the Land of Fish. There is nothing, Donnchadh, like a house full of laughter on a night of darkness and rain and storm!"

Don. The storm may pass as it began——

Hugh (*in derision*). Father, he says the storm may pass!

Don. And leave the sky clear for the moon. If it rise we could go to the fields.

Hugh. No, Donal, not after moonrise, unless we build ourselves a boat. At moonrise, clear or dark, down fall the dykes, and the water spreads. Father, a house full of laughter, full of firelight in a waste of black waters!—Make a poem of it, Donal! Why are you so sad—the two of you, staring at me like that! Would you have me join you?—why, this night when the dykes fall——

Sean. They will not fall!

Hugh. When the dykes fall the poem-book of the O'Falveys will crack its leathern

cheeks with laughing at us! Why let it have all the sport to itself?

Don. Sit down, you are like a man in a fever.

Hugh. Father, if you had not defied us and taken our hoardings and spent them on the poem-book of the O'Falveys, why, this night there would be no house of laughter at all—like a shining fairy palace in the waters!—Take it out, Donal. Set it there.

Sean. There are many poems in it, and it was men like you who wrote them. You are not the first O'Falvey who had a bitter tongue.

Hugh. Take it out, Donal.—No?

[*He goes himself, takes out the book, pulls the table to the middle of the room, and sets the book upon it.*

There! Let it see its handiwork. Light a candle for it. Its eyes are dark.

[*He lights a candle and sets it on the book.*

Now, we may sit around it.

Don. Why are you so bitter? In his day our father worked the life of two strong men out of his limbs and back—you know it——

Hugh. And spent his earnings on a book!

Don. Many another has spent his earnings in Stephen's tavern and yet lives happily with his sons.

Hugh. Why, there you have another poem. Call it the Curse of Sean O'Falvey on his eldest son for trying to save his corn from the floods when he might have passed the livelong day stretched upon a book at the fire!—like his brother!

Sean (*leaping up angrily*). Ay, a poem could be made of it.

Hugh. Surely! Surely!

Sean (*fiercely*). Do you dare me?

Fathers, be ye wise as Sean was wise:
When autumn's floods would on his inches rise
His good son, Hugh, he'd send to save the corn;
But when Time's flood would rise to sweep away
Clan Falvey's record from the light of day,
To baulk that flood he'd send his youngest born!

Hugh (*changing and breaking out*). Stop that gabbling tongue. A verse like that

might go from Desmond to Donegal. I do not want the people to stare at me.

Sean (*fiercely*)—

Thrift more than this there could not be,
A son for song, a son for drudgery,
A son for fame, a son to clean the byre——

Hugh. Do not make me wild! Move away, Donal. I'm telling you to move away. I will not strike him. Nor you. Look how I am repaid, my drudgery! He will take his song to the tavern——

Don. He will not.

Hugh. He will. He is proud of it!

Don. No, no. Sit down, father.

Sean (*still standing*). A son for fame, a son to clean the byre!

Don. Father, you must sit down now.

Hugh. He has not yet finished. This is my wages!

Don. You tempted him.

Hugh. A long day's drudgery shouldn't tempt him; if that is temptation——

Don. You know he loves the book.

Hugh. The book! The book! Call it the scourge, the plague, the curse of the O'Falveys——

Don. There, you tempt him again!

Hugh. What have I said? What else is it?

Don. There! It is a book of poems to me, to him——

Hugh. To him it is more than you or I—it fools us.

Don. It may be so, but it is a precious thing to him.

Hugh. It wouldn't keep the roof above us.

Sean (*strongly*). Twenty sons would not cockcrow it over me.

Don. Father, you forget your promise.

Hugh. 'Tis he is in the wrong. And you, Donal, or you wouldn't be so calm.

Sean. There's your house of laughter in the floods!

Don. We are all in the wrong. Father, you and I have been in the wrong all day. Hugh, you are right. Only for you we'd be wandering on the hills this night, like many another of the seed of Eibhir! Sometimes we forget it.

Hugh. You forget it!

Don. Yes, but I said so to my father before you came in.

Hugh. What did you say?

Don. That I had left the drudgery to you and that I had done wrong.

Hugh. I had not asked your help. What could you have done? At moonrise our harvest is lost on us.

Sean (*more calmly*). I have seen all Desmond in a flame! Why do we torture one another?

Hugh (*speaking what had been in his mind all the time*). In the fogs of morning I went to the inches. I piled what I could of the sheaves on the rock: no floods ever went so high, I said. I worked and worked. Then something came upon me and I turned and looked across the fields, and I saw that what I could save of it would scarcely be a fistful out of the whole. And so I ran to the dyke and strengthened it with stones and bushes. But again something came over me, and I left the dyke and ran back to the rock and—Donal, you said I looked like a man in a fever: a fever it was. All day long I flung from rock to dyke and from dyke to rock, confused and bothered in my mind. Then the wind went round and all my work was in vain: I knew what would happen when the moon rose. I turned my back on it, and came up, and found this house like a bedroom of a morning, drowsy and thick with heat.

Don. We have done you a great wrong——

Hugh. And I laughed—laughed at the man who had been running the whole day from rock to dyke and from dyke to rock, like a fool! It was better to laugh.

Sean. Hugh, Donal has spoken for me: we have done you a great wrong!

Hugh. Because if I did not laugh——

Sean. Let it go, lad, let it go. You are our right hand.

Don. We will come through: our father has seen this land in a flame.

Hugh. But my thoughts go back to it, my field of gold! It was heavy and good, and only last Sunday when the red sun of evening was on it, and I had leisure to watch it——

Sean. Sit down, lad. Come.

[Donal *places food and drink on the table.*

Hugh. I envy you—I see you lose yourself in this book: your face lightens, the heaviness goes from your brow.

Don. Come to the table. Eat slowly at first. The ale is good. It will inspirit you —I wish 'twas wine.

[Hugh *seats himself at the table.*

Sean. Hugh, listen to me: the end of the

day will be yours. When I am gone, and Donal is a poor scholar on the hills, going from Iveragh to Imokilly and from Imokilly to Aherlow, wandering from school to school, no better than Donnchadh Ruadh himself, you will have a house full of children about you. Do not fear. The end of the day will be yours.

Hugh. The ale is good. Father, it needs no nutmeg.

Don. Father, we have spent the whole day with Rory of the Wine Kegs and yet our best drink is but cheap ale! His sea caves at Derrynane must be in the hands of strangers or empty!

Sean. I heard wine kegs passing on the road last night. It was Sylvie Mahony's boat that ran them in.

Don. Why, so did I! And I thought of him, of Rory, how little Sylvie Mahony cares for his wild ghost! And I prayed that his soul may rest in peace.

Hugh. I heard them too, urging their horses. I remember it. I was half asleep. "Go by," I said, "not through my fields of corn, rough lads with the jerkins, go by." And I went to sleep again.

Sean (with vision). And I!—why, I went

with them. I drank with them. I ruled them at their feasting! In my thought, I mean. One becomes foolish in old age!

Hugh. Not foolish!—the bravest dream of all! And the nearest to Rory's, if he ever dreams at all in his tomb in Muckross.

Don. And the hardest to put away.

Hugh. Rory of the Wine Kegs is a good name. Since we began speaking of him I have forgotten the sight of my floating corn. There, I have left him for a moment and I see it again. I can eat no more.

[*He rises up.*

Don. Sit again, Hugh.

Hugh. No, no, I cannot. It is not long to moonrise. Maybe they will hold after all.

Don. There is some one abroad. The rain has ceased, I think.

Hugh. It is Tadhg O'Dinneen: I can hear his stick tapping. Open for him.

Don. There is some one else.

Sean. If it be Donnchadh Ruadh or any of his companions, tell them this is no place for them to-night.

Don. (*having opened the door*). Welcome, Tadhg of the Songs!

Sean. Who is with him?

Hugh. It is an old man. Now, father, greet them with the words and phrases that go with the Clan Falvey.

Sean. Or as befits a wasteful old man.

Enter TADHG O'DINNEEN *and the* SHANACHIE OF IVERAGH.

Tadhg (*greeting them*). Blessing and victory!

Sean. The light of God comes with ye. Welcome, a hundred thousand welcomes.

Hugh. Sit here, sir. You are a stranger.

S. of I. I will. Welcome is sweet on such a night.

Hugh. Take your cloak from your shoulders. We will put it at the fire.

[Hugh *takes his cloak and spreads it at the fire.*

S. of I. Yes. I will.

Tadhg. This is the cloak of the Shanachie of Iveragh.

Sean. Is it the Shanachie of Iveragh I am looking at?

Tadhg. It is. He travels to Cork, to the house of Daniel O'Callaghan at Threshers-town, to read in his library.

Sean. The light of God comes with ye. Tadhg, I am thankful. You laid a rich

account of our treasure before him, and he turned at the temptation and came to us.

S. of I. My journey grows fruitful, kind people. Desmond is richer than I dreamt. The elements assist me. Floods cover my roadway, and I find treasure in my stopping places.

Sean. You will stay with us. The tavern is rough and unwholesome.

S. of I. You are too kind to a stranger.

Tadhg. Your book is ready before us? This is the poem-book of the Clan Falvey.

[*He lays his hand on the book.*

Sean. We have spent the day upon it.

Tadhg (*to the* S. of I.). I would hear you unravel the passage about the two Rorys.

Sean. Open it, Donal. It is all we have worthy of you, man of letters.

S. of I. They are to me what good inns are to another—these books. They stand at the stages of my journey.

Don. Here, sir, is the passage. The two names, Rory of the Wine Kegs and Rory of the Forest, come into it. My father reasons them into one, because he wishes it.

[*The* S. of I. *bends over the book.* Tadhg *and* Sean *draw apart.*

Sean (*timidly*). My son reads these poems in the spirit of his youth, learned sir.

Tadhg. He does not hear you. Look, he bends upon it. He drinks it up.

[Hugh *and* Donal *draw around the* S. of I.

Sean (*to* Tadhg, *nervously*). If it be true! Tadhg, if it be true!

Tadhg. I hold it to be true.

Sean. Tadhg, we have been railing at one another. Young men are not accustomed to misfortunes: because the flood threatens our harvest, we must offend one another like Cromwellian churls.

Tadhg. Yes, yes. You are hot in your ways.

Sean. If that riddle be opened out for us to-night, the mercies of God are infinite. But it cannot be true, our thought of it.

S. of I. (*to the two sons*). Lads, lads, it is close-knit and old—very old.

Sean. What does he say?

Tadhg. He says it is old.

Sean. Yes. How could it be true? Look, these walls, they will no longer keep out the winds nor keep in the smoke: they leak. And the thatch is old: it drips cold water in our faces while we sleep. How could it be

true? Tanist of Corkaguiney! Lords of Corkaguiney—the Annals record it, Tadhg.

Tadhg. Yes.

Sean. Our harvest this night will be but a handful of chaff in the flood.

Tadhg. Hush. [*A moment's silence.*

Tadhg. He looks at us.

Sean. Sir!

S. of I. It is hard and old. It was taken from an older book. The scribe left it stand as he found it: perhaps he was afraid that he did not fully understand it. I use the same caution myself.

Tadhg. It will yield to you.

S. of I. (*with benign confidence*). It will.

[*He bends on the book. A silence.*

Sean. It cannot be what we imagine. The O'Falveys in the Annals were not useless old men with bitter tongues, neither would they rail if a handful of chaff were swept from them.

Tadhg. Do not stand.

Sean. I must. I will not. Whisper, Tadhg, my son would marry: his face is hungry. But who would marry one who has no wealth? If our thought were true how I would laugh at the farmers back in the glens, with their secret stores of gold!

Tadhg. Do not speak so loud.

Sean. Whisper: Look at Donal there: is he not comely! I would send him to Louvain, to the college. The Clan Falvey has had bishops before now: their names are in the Annals.

Tadhg. Hush. He smiles; his task is ended.

S. of I. (*looking up*). Ah!

Sean. How royal he looks! The light of learning is upon him.

S. of I. (*reading*): "Rory of the Forest is he: he is straitened for gold. The forests of his fathers, he has laid them prostrate: their timber fills the slender barques and rides over the sea to Spain——"

Sean. I must stand.

Tadhg. No, no. Sh!

S. of I. (*reading*): "Clan Falvey's brows are dark to see their hillsides like a corpse on the battle field—the vultures have plucked it. But Rory will not yield: his jest is before them: he says they will not turn their nostrils from the timber when it is once again among them, seasoned and ripened in the sun of Spain." I pause a moment, friends.

Sean. We have been speaking of wine kegs the livelong night.

S. of I. Now, I continue: "It is true: the oak timber returns from Spain as well-shaped, sweet-smelling wine kegs. And Clan Falvey does not turn its nose away! Rory of the Forest is without a forest. But he is not without the wood that grew on the hills. He is Rory of the Forest no longer: he is Rory of the Wine Kegs now. His people acclaim him and his countenance is bright." There is the message!

Tadhg (*crying out*). It is mine to proclaim it to the world. Open wide the door!

Sean. The Shanachie has spoken! Tadhg, tell me, have we heard a voice speaking of the two Rorys that were one?

Tadhg. His words stand good for all Ireland. The two Rorys were one! Here am I kneeling before you. [*He kneels.*

Sean. Do not mock me. Hugh, Donal, have the lips of that royal old man who bends upon my book spoken to us this night?

Don. The two Rorys were one.

Hugh. Tadhg, rise up: you disturb him. What are you saying? My father looks wild. [Tadhg *is muttering.*

Sean. What am I to say now? what am I to do?—a poor, thriftless, cranky old man

who would turn his back on the world! Tadhg, instruct me what to do, what to say in the face of all men!

S. of I. I gather in the story. It is my place equally (*he rises up*) to kneel to The O'Falvey. Chief of the Clan Falvey! Victory and blessing! [*He kneels.*

Don. The O'Falvey—I kneel to him. O'Falvey! victory and blessing!

Hugh. Forgive me! [*He kneels.*

Sean (*proudly*). I am The O'Falvey!—(*His strength wavers.*) I cannot stand. I am dazzled with old deeds, old words, a hundred thousand names! And your mother, my children, she died before her time. Let ye rise up: this is no place for stateliness. Sir, you will rise up (*they rise up*). Hugh, I will fall on the ground if you do not take my hand.

Hugh. Father, sit here.

[Hugh *takes his hand with great reverence.*

Sean. We can now bear a little tribulation, Hugh. We, children of kings, sons of Milesius——

Hugh. Yes, we were but churls.

Don. How shall we come before the people from this hut?

Tadhg. What says the rhyme?

Falvey is Falvey even in the ashes,
Even in the saddle, Falvey is Falvey still.

S. of I. Ah!

Tadhg. Where now are the Falveys of Faha!—with their slated house and their estates.

Sean (*to the* S. of I.). Sir, Daniel O'Callaghan will bring his books hither to you—it is but right.

[*They stare at him. The sound of a horse stopping at the door is heard. Then the door is beaten.*

This may be his messenger. I think I ordered O'Callaghan to do so.

Father B. (*outside*). Open: the blessing of God on you.

Don. Who is it?

Hugh. I will open: it is no bailiff: it is a Gael.

[*He opens the door.* Sean *stands as if he were about to receive a king into the house. A priest enters.*

Don. Would you not sit down?

Hugh. You are a priest! You are welcome. Yes, we are the Falveys.

Fr. B. Then I have news for you. I

thought it right you should know it. I have never been in these parts before.

Hugh. Yes: it is long since we saw a priest on this side of the hill. You will take your cloak off: it is heavy with wet.

Fr. B. It is. Your house is full. Perhaps I need not have come at all. Indeed I need not, for the news was spreading through the land as I came: a bellman was calling it out and riding from place to place.

Don. (*to the* priest). We are confused. Forgive us, Father. We have had sudden news already: we are astray. Father, this is our parish priest: we have not seen him before. This is Father Boland.

Sean. Yes, I see who it is in spite of his lowly guise.

Fr. B. The blessing of God on your house, Sean O'Falvey.

Sean (*smiling*). Ah, sir; you would begin with a lesson in humility: it is but right: who does not need it? . . . but *Sean* O'Falvey is dead! [*He laughs gently.*

Fr. B. (*to the others*). I am glad, neighbours, it is not I who have brought you the first tidings. I could find no messenger. They were busy with their corn. But courage! All may be well.

Sean. Better than well, sir. Better than well. They shall be harried and driven no more, the clan Falvey. I will be a shield of protection to them. I will gather them together—from Iveragh, from Desmond, from Corkaguiney—my clansmen, one and all! The Cromwellians shall harry them no more!

Don. Come, father, and sit down.

[*He leads* Sean *apart.* Sean *sits. His eyes are bright; his brows knitted in vigorous thought.*

Hugh (*to* priest). Father, you speak sadly: we do not understand.

Fr. B. (*looking round on* Tadhg *and the* S. of I.). These must have brought you the story.

[*A crier's bell rings at a distance, then ceases. They all listen.*

Ah, he has overtaken me!

Tadhg. We do not know your news. What has the bellman's cry to do with us?

[*The bell is again heard. A voice intoning a message follows on its sounds. The words are not understood, they are just a drone.* Sean *lifts his head as if approving the message. He nods to emphasise it.*

Fr. B. There is the message! My heart bleeds for you, my people.

Hugh. Do I hear my father's name in it?

Fr. B. I am sorry: it is his name.

Don. I could not catch the words: the wind blows them about. (*To the* priest.) Father, you will speak them better to us.

[*Bell rings again, and the message is again intoned. They listen in fear.*

Sean (*crying out suddenly and brightly, as if giving orders*). A hundred fat beeves! twelve vats of good ale! wine from the sea-caves at Derrynane! Rich cloaks! A hundred harps!

[*He subsides into a muttering.*

Fr. B. Stay by your father. He is excited.

Hugh. The bell brings some old story back to him. Your news would be spoken long since if it were good. I must go out at moonrise to my fields: speak your news, sir.

Fr. B. Your fields!

Hugh. Is it our land that is in danger?

Fr. B. Your land, your house, your cattle!—They are to be canted over your head. I am bidden to announce the sale at the Mass to-morrow. How can I help you?

Hugh. This place! These few fields

where we were born. My father is far too old for that! They will not take our few fields away!

Fr. B. If you could bid against the offers, you might save them.

Hugh. Bid! We can bid a book—a book that has told its tale!

Fr. B. (*sternly*). Can you bid against them?

Hugh. Pardon me, I speak the plain truth. It is the one precious thing we have.

S. of I. The O'Falvey without a roof! Is that the story I must bear with me?

Fr. B. (*to* Hugh). The O'Falveys of Faha, you might go to them.

Hugh. My father would not speak to them: they have kept their estates.

[*Bell rings and the message is announced as before.*

Ah! our name is in every mouth by this! They are counting their gold pieces and settling our price. A bit of bogland, yet they covet it. (*He starts, listens and cries out*): Now! Now! Ah!

[*A smothered roar, as of a rush of water, is heard in the distance. Then the bell as before.*

Fr. B. Mother of God! What is that roaring?

Hugh (*recklessly*). Ring! Ring! The dykes are down. We are broken. Ring the O'Falveys from Lissnagaun! Father, rise up now. Rise up to us. We are free of all Desmond—and of Corkaguiney too. Great days are come to us. Our book will tell us its grand stories—may they have no end. Rise, father, and be glad.

Sean. Great days indeed. My son, your voice confirms me.

Hugh. Yes. Yes.

Sean. Drudgery and markets and quarrelling—for many a day these would rise around me, chattering. Your words banish them. Clan Falvey is ready for the feasting. Friends and neighbours, you have come a long distance. We can scarce find room. When your horses are stabled we shall be more at ease. (*To the* priest.) My Lord Abbot, it was Humphrey O'Falvey founded your Abbey in 1265. It is recorded in the Annals. He had done deeds of blood in his youth. You are fitly come. This is our eldest son: he goes to-morrow to wed the daughter of the MacCarthy Mor: the pearl of Loch Lene. And here is Donal. He has

been at fosterage with Thaddeus O'Donoghue of the Glen. All the learning of Glenflesk, he brings it with him: it shines about him. He goes soon to the University of Salamanca with O'Neill's son. (*The bell rings again.*) Yes, yes. We delay. I go to the Brehon stone to judge my people: my crier is abroad, you hear him? This is my most learned ollamh (*indicating the* S. of I.). He assists me with the laws. My Lord Abbot, it wearies me—the judging. My people are hungry for law: their little scraps of fields! You would think them royal estates. I laugh to see them so earnest about them. But come. Our pipers go first —our pipers——

[*He makes for door.* Donal *tries to check him.*

Don. Not to-night, father. The fields are flooded.

Sean. The door! Passage!—Passage for The O'Falvey!

[*He flings open the door: it is all desolation outside; a wind is driving by.*

Sean. Hugh! The corn! The corn!

[*He falls down. They rush to him. After a moment of confusion:—*

Fr. B. Gently, gently, where does he sleep? Lift him, gently, gently.

Don. Father, father, speak to us.

Hugh (*to* priest). Say he will recover, Father.

Fr. B. He will. It will pass off.

Don. Father, father!

Hugh. Tadhg, go in you and light the torch. [Tadhg *goes in to next room.*

Hugh. Lift him up now. Easy.

Fr. B. (*murmurs*). Averte faciem tuam a peccatis eius et omnes iniquitates suas dele.

[*They bear in* Sean. *Only the* S. of I. *remains. After a moment* Tadhg *returns.*

S. of I. (*lifting his head*). Does The O'Falvey breathe?

Tadhg. He does.

S. of I. He will recover?

Tadhg. He will.

S. of I. I am sorry for it.

CURTAIN

This play, translated into Irish by Sean Toibin, was performed, under the title of "O Failbhe Mor," for the first time in the "Grianan," Cork, on 4th April 1919, by the St Finnbarr's branch of the Gaelic League, with the following cast:—

Sean O'Falvey -	*Sean O Faolain*
Hugh O'Falvey -	*Padruig O h-Anneagain*
Donal O'Falvey -	*Diarmuid O Seaghdha*
Tadhg O'Dinneen	*E. Mac Amhlaoibh*
The Shanachie of Iveragh - -	*Riobard O Searmain*
Father Boland -	*D. O Murthuile*

The play was produced by Daniel Corkery

THE YELLOW BITTERN

THE YELLOW BITTERN

"The Yellow Bittern" is simply a dramatisation of the story of Cahal Bwee Mac-Elgunn's death as told in a note in that most interesting book, "Cead de Cheoltaibh Uladh," by Enri O'Muirgheasa (p. 325).

"But another version of Cahal's death was related to me by Mrs. Goodman of Corlea, in Farney, who gave me most of the above anecdotes. According to this, Cahal was dying in a deserted house, but a kindly neighbour went for the priest. The priest arrived in time, and was waited on by a very modest, demure woman. On his return journey the priest called at a neighbour's house and inquired who was the strange woman that was in attendance on Cahal. They did not know; every inquiry was made in the neighbourhood, and it was found that no woman of the neighbourhood had gone near Cahal's house, probably owing to his bad reputation. The priest then recalling the manner

and appearance of the woman concluded, or at any rate the people did, that it was the Blessed Virgin herself that came to succour poor repentant Cahal in his desolation."

Thomas MacDonagh's very fine translation of Cahal's poem, "An Bunan Bwee" ("The Yellow Bittern"), is, of course, well known, but I thought it well to make my own translation of such lines of it as I needed, since verses in drama must be quite straightforward. The other verses in the play are taken from other poems by Cahal Bwee. For the originals as well as for a wealth of other information about the Irish poets of Ulster, see Mr. Enri O'Muirgheasa's invaluable book.

PERSONS

Shawn MacDonnell	*An old man*
Nora O'Neill	*His married daughter*
Hugh MacAleenan	*An old man*
Sheela Gallagher	
Cahal Bwee MacElgunn	
Father Walsh	

PLACE

Interior of a peasant's hut in Ulster

TIME

About 1756

SCENE

A peasant's hut. There is a door in the back wall, giving on road; a door on left leading to inner room. At the right a turf fire. The furniture is of the usual description. Evening is coming on.

Curtain rising discovers Hugh MacAleenan *seated, his hands crossed on top of his stick;* Shawn *is standing over him.* Nora O'Neill *is seated at fire.*

THE YELLOW BITTERN

A Play in One Act

Hugh (*talking loudly to* Shawn, *who is rather deaf*). 'Tis *not* the best song was ever made; far from it; Munster had the poetry always, and always will have it. 'Tis a thing beyond the power of Ulster, the poetry is. So there!

Shawn. "Gile na Gile" is a fine song—a fine, wordy song with music in it; I'm not saying otherwise; but "An Bunan Bwee" is a better song (*speaking more loudly and warmly*) and a merrier song, and an Ulster song into the bargain. [*He turns to go.*

Hugh. "Gile na Gile" is a song for a palace (*he rises up*) and harpers and kings! And your "An Bunan Bwee" is a roadside song. Sing it at the fairs, Shawn—go out and sing it at the fairs of Ulster, like Cahal Bwee himself, with his pedlar's box beside him—psh!

Shawn (*not hearing*). And 'tis a true song! And that's a thing can't be said for the

songs brought into us from Munster, with their fairy women and their goddesses from Greece.

Hugh (*scornfully*). 'Tis a true song—and a low song—you may well say it.

Nora. Be quiet, Hughie; he doesn't hear you; don't be vexing him; let him go out and split the bit of fir. (*To* Shawn.) There's the axe.

Shawn (*axe in hand*). The song says the yellow bittern is a bird does no damage to the country; and 'tis a true saying, because it doesn't; isn't it true in that much?

Hugh. 'Tis!—'Tis a fine thing to be put in a song, surely!

Shawn. And the song says that Cahal Bwee himself was the likeness of the yellow bird, the same in habits, and the same in colour; both of them would be out at night when other folk would be in their beds; and both of them were yellow—now, isn't it a true song?

Hugh. 'Tis a fine song surely—a dead bird, stretched on the flat of his back, and his feet sticking up to the sky!

[*He points the fingers of both hands towards the roof.*

Nora (*with curiosity*). And maybe the song

says that Cahal would only do as little harm as the bird—and the two of them rambling about the parishes in the dark of night——?

Hugh (*in a hard voice*). Cahal Bwee was a rascal and a stroller and a deceiver of women; and the priests cursed him; and only God knows where he is now, or whether he's dead or alive; maybe 'tis dead he is.

Shawn (*to* Nora). What is he saying?

Nora (*with mockery*). He says Cahal Bwee never did any harm, and he straying about from place to place in the nights—no more than the yellow bittern in the song.

Shawn (*goes close to* Hugh, *as if to answer him; then withdraws scornfully, making for door on left, at which he pauses*). Was Cahal Bwee worse than the Munstermen—tell me that? The Munstermen of Slieve Luachra would make a love song to an old furze bush if only, if only the wind was after blowing a bit of a petticoat around it.—There for you!

[*He turns away triumphant.*

Nora. Go on out.

Shawn. I'm going out, and I'll lie down on my bed of memorising—there's your axe—and even if the light of morning overtakes me I won't rise out of it till I have "An Buuan Bwee" back again on the tip of my

tongue, the same as I had it forty years ago when poor Cahal himself made it and the kingdom of Ulster was singing it from end to end. [*He goes out at left.*

Nora. There now!

Hugh (*kindly*). 'Twill do him good. If he gets back the memory of that song he'll be like a girl and she after meeting her lad at the fair, so he will; he'll be dreaming on it.

Nora. But was he as bad as that?

Hugh. Who?

Nora. Cahal Bwee, the poet.

Hugh (*severely*). Didn't the priests put a curse on the house would entertain him? Isn't that evidence against him? But that was long ago. 'Tisn't much harm he'd do anyone now; there was a man saw him in Farney, and he's broken, he said, with no one to help him or to take him in, and his stock gone.

Nora. 'Tis like a judgment on him after his wicked life.

Hugh. And I wonder does he be thinking now of his Kate, and his Nancy Quigley, and his modest Molly (*with raillery*):—

O modest maiden, come walk the roadside,
And 'tis a sweet lodging you'll have by night;
With flute and organ to make a music
Would change black sorrow into sweet
delight.

Nora. And he's wandering about, broken and spent?

Hugh. From green to green, from fair to fair, where he used to be selling his goods and making sport and pleasure for all.

Nora. And no place to take him in?

Hugh. Who'd take him in, woman—and a curse around him?

Nora. And he dying?

Hugh. So they say: indeed some of them say he's dead and buried in some unknown grave. Who knows?

Nora. 'Tis a frightful ending to his days and to his share of songs, a curse to be on the house he would enter and on the threshold he would cross over.

[*She looks around and sees an old decrepit man standing in the doorway at the back.*

Mother of God! who's that?

Hugh. I'll call Richy up, I'll call Shawn.

Nora. Don't leave me, Hughie.

Hugh. 'Tis himself!—'Tis Cahal Bwee!—God protect us all!

Nora (*nerving herself*). What is it you want?

Cahal (*in a weak yet fierce voice*). Rest!

Nora. The house is full; 'tis a small house.

Cahal. A corner of the settle——

[*He makes to step in; she fronts him.*

Nora (*angrily*). You'll not cross that threshold!

Hugh. There's a better house beyond—down the road.

Nora. There's many a better house—there's the weaver's.

Cahal. I'm dying on my feet; woman of the house, take pity on me.

Hugh. There's the tavern will be glad of your company.

Cahal. My throat is scalded; there's a thirst in my heart—I'm parched and blistered with the fever.

Nora. Merciful God, would you bring the fever in on top of us!

Cahal. Let me in before I fall on the threshold.

Hugh. There's a hut for fever patients at——

Nora. Hush!—he's going——

[Cahal, *muttering, turns away.*

[*A silence.*

Hugh (*whispering*). Don't say a word to vex him; he has great powers.

Nora (*calling out*). Down the road; to the left.

Hugh. Hush now! He might put your name in a song would live for ever.

[*They stand silent for a short time, staring through doorway.*

Nora (*with a change*). What came over me?

Hugh. How? What came over you?

Nora. I'm after doing a hard, cruel thing.

Hugh. How could you help it? You're after doing what's right; 'twould be a nice sight for Richy to come in and find that old rascal before him——

Nora. Hush! Hughie, hush!

Hugh. I'll say it out!—that old rascal on the settle, and a curse on the house, filling every corner of it—'twould so!

Nora. Go to the door and look after him.

Hugh (*as if afraid*). Tell me first what he said and he going.

Nora. He only said the one word Rest! but he said it often.

Hugh. Are you sure of it?

Nora. I am; look out after him.

[Hugh *goes to door.*

He's not there.

Hugh. Where do you mean?

Nora. He didn't fall down at the haggart?

Hugh. No; 'tis getting dusk; oh, there's

the MacBrides after shutting their door against him; he's crossing over now——

Nora. Come in; you'll be thinking of what you're looking at, always and ever——

Hugh. He's not able to walk; he's making for the weaver's; he's going in——

Nora. And there's no one there but herself and Nuala—honour of God!

Hugh. Whisht! he's gone in; he's after falling, I think——

Nora. The poor, honest woman!

Hugh. There's Nuala now running over the fields—where is she going?

Nora. Come in, Hughie, come in; don't be telling me things to be brooding on.

Shawn (*shouting from within*). Is Hughie there?

Nora (*aloud*). He is. (*Whispering.*) Don't tell him what we're after doing, the pair of us.

Shawn (*within*). Listen—'tis coming back to me, little by little, like a hill through a mist——

Hugh. What is he talking about?

Nora. Let him talk away. Do you see anyone else running, hither or thither?

Shawn (*within*). Are you listening to Cahal Bwee's song?

Hugh. We are——

Shawn (*within*)——

O yellow bird, bad news I've heard,
Your limbs stretched out after all the fun,
And 'tisn't want of food, but of drinking good
Has stretched you flat with your feet to the sun.

Nora (*to* Hugh). Is that it?

Hugh. 'Tis.

Nora. 'Tis a frightful song!

Shawn (*within*). Is Hughie gone?

Hugh. Say I'm gone.

Nora. He's gone out.

Shawn (*within*). 'Tis coming to me grand; no Munster song that was ever made is like it.

Nora. Hugh—is there anyone stirring?

Hugh. Not one.

Nora. She didn't throw him out?

Hugh. No.

Nora. Things will go against me from this day.

Hugh. Where did Nuala Gallagher go to? She was in a great haste. [*Looks out.*

Nora. For the priest she went; where else?

Hugh. He wasn't dying, surely?

Nora. Wasn't he in the height of the fever and he standing there.

Hugh (*looking out*). Oh!

Nora. What now?

Hugh. Here's Sheela Gallagher herself flying up to us.

Nora. Up to us?

Hugh. This way surely she's coming.

Nora. Sit down, Hughie, don't be watching her. [*Hugh sits down.* There's trouble to come on a woman and the day at an end.

Enter Mrs GALLAGHER *hurriedly.*

Mrs G. Is himself here? Is Richy here?

Nora. No; why? He's abroad. Is it trouble is come on you?

Mrs G. There's a poor wisp of a man dying in my house beyond.

Nora. What sort is he?

Mrs G. A queer sort of man; he's writing on the walls with two bits of burnt sticks—one in the fire while he's using the other.

Hugh (*with meaning*). Aye surely, writing; what else?

Nora. Do you know him? What kind did you say he was?

Mrs G. A little yellow man and he

blazing with the fever; 'tis down in the fever hut he should be by right.

Hugh. And you don't know him?

Mrs G. No. Why are ye looking at me like that?

Hugh. All Ulster knows him.

Nora. 'Tis a famous man he is.

Mrs G. Who is he? In God's name, tell me.

Hugh. 'Tis Cahal Bwee MacElgunn you have in your holy house this night.

Mrs G. O Saviour! who was it sent *him* into me? [*She sits down weakly.*

Nora. Where's Nuala from you?

Mrs G. For the priest she's gone. Nora O'Neill, what'll I do this blessed evening? The priest of Farney left seven curses on the person would take in Cahal Bwee.

Nora. When you didn't know? 'Tisn't Cahal Bwee you took in; 'tis a poor fevered man.

Mrs G. And the priest coming, and not a table ready, nor a candle lighting, nor a towel, nor one bit — Nora O'Neill, make ready and come with me——

Nora. I must refuse you, because I'm knowledgeable of the man.

Mrs G. (*to* Hughie, *who is at the door*). Hughie! Hughie MacAleenan, you'll come

with me; the priest is coming and not a towel to his hand. Hughie, won't you stir?

Shawn (*within*). Is Hughie there?

Hugh (*glad to escape* Mrs Gallagher's *question*). I am; and I'm listening.

Shawn (*within*). Well, then, here's more of it:—

What say ye all to your brother Cahal,
But that in the end like the bird he'll die;
But indeed 'tisn't so, for this noble crow
Found death when his tongue with the drought was dry.

What have you to say to that, Hughie?

Mrs G. What song is it he's saying?

Hugh. Cahal Bwee's wild song of the Yellow Bittern.

Mrs G. Would Shawn come with me? He'd be company, and he was always a great man for the poetry. I'll call him.

Nora. You will not; he's old, and 'tis a small thing would excite him.

Mrs G. And is the house to be dark and dull, and the priest going into it with the Sacrament?

Hugh. Don't speak till you know——

Nora. The man is cursed.

Mrs G. King of the Graces, pity me!

Nora. Take comfort; you're after doing what is right; 'tis the priest is the best doctor for Cahal and he going home.

Hugh. He was writing, you say?

Mrs G. With burnt sticks on the white wall, and he muttering and stopping, and then writing as quick as an attorney, and then calling on the Mother of God, and speaking Latin, and the sweat standing on his temples and running down!

Hugh. Merciful God! 'tis coming back to him how he got the learning to be a priest.

Nora. Do you say that?

Hugh (*firmly*). There's one man in this parish ought to know that Cahal Bwee is near his end, and that's that man inside on his bed of memorising. (*He cries out.*) Shawn! Shawn!

Shawn (*within*). Whisth! Why will ye be disturbing me? Is it an easy thing to be untangling old songs, one from another? But listen, Hughie:—

[*He partly opens door.*

O Bittern, O! 'tis my grief and woe,
You to be stretched in the bushes bare,
And the big mice making towards your waking,
Sport and pleasure to be finding there!

Hugh (*crying out*). Shawn, I'm telling ye—— [*He steps towards the door.*

Shawn (*shutting the door*). You'll not come in here till I've called back every word of it.

Hugh (*crying out*). Shawn, 'tis a true song —every word of it (*wailing*). He's stretched out indeed, the Yellow Bittern, and 'tis many a dark thing is moving now across the bogs to his wake and to the torment of his soul—Uch! Ochone!

Mrs G. In the name of God, Nora O'Neill, take my hand and we'll go in together and make him ready for the priest.

Nora. No woman of this place will cross your threshold, Mrs Gallagher, while that man is within it.

Hugh (*crying out*). Shawn, do you hear me? Cahal Bwee is writing his Song of Repentance in Sheela Gallagher's house—the dews of death are on him.

Nora. Let him be, Hughie.

[Hugh *goes to door on back.*

Mrs G. Give me a grain of salt—I can't remember if there's any below.

Hugh (*at door*). There's the priest going in; and Nuala not with him at all.

Mrs G. I'm disgraced this night and for ever. Ye held me here.

Nora. Be quiet, woman; Father Walsh will understand what drove you out.

Mrs G. Likely when my own time comes 'tis without priest I'll go; and 'twill be serving me right.

Nora. Don't be crying against God! Didn't I myself drive him from that door like you'd drive away a dirty sow would be nosing for offal? And I'm not complaining.

Mrs G. You did, you did, but the death wasn't on him then.

Hugh. Don't be quarrelling or complaining at all; 'twas the will of God that he should die like the bird he lamented—(*cries out*) Shawn!—'tis a great story, and Shawn shouldn't be without knowing it—Shawn!

Shawn. I hear you; you're getting covetous; but listen, listen, Hughie:—

Not for the thrushes my lament gushes,
Nor herons nor ousels nor all that crew,
But my bittern yellow, a hearty fellow,
Like me in habits, and like me in hue.

Hugh. Do you hear it? Do ye hear it? God help us all! 'Tis a better song than was ever made in Munster, the land of learning—

Not for the thrushes my lament gushes,
Nor herons nor ousels nor all that crew—

(*crying out*) Shawn—the Yellow Bittern is struggling with the fever and he lonely in Sheela Gallagher's house——

Shawn. Hush, can't ye, hush!

Nora. Leave him alone.

Hugh (*rising up*). Mrs Gallagher, come on out. Where the priest is standing any Christian might take his stand——

Mrs G. No, Hughie, I wouldn't face the priest; I can never face him again.

Hugh. I'll go myself in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

[*He goes out, crossing himself.*

Nora. Woman of Sorrow; the priest will understand; 'tis of the poet's departing soul 'twould be right for us now to be thinking and begging mercy.

Mrs G. Light a candle, Nora, and we'll say a round of the beads.

[Nora *lights a candle.* *Voices outside.* Hugh *enters, followed by* priest.

Hugh. Here she is, Father, as I said, on her knees before you——

Mrs G. (*swaying on her knees*). Uch! Ochone!

Fr. W. (*with great solemnity*). I ask you, neighbour, what woman was it welcomed me at the door of your house yonder?

Mrs G. It was my place to be there before you, Father. Uch! Ochone!

Fr. W. You have not answered me.

Mrs G. I deserve your chiding, and chiding from the lips of the Son of God as well.

Fr. W. I do not chide you; a woman stood in the door of your house as I went in; she did not speak, or else her voice was very low.

Mrs G. The house was desolate and I leaving it, Father.

Fr. W. Was it Mrs Gilligan or Tim Lynch's woman, or was it your daughter, Hugh, is married to the smith of Ardnacartan?

Mrs G. It was not my daughter, Father?

Fr. W. I left Nuala following me along the road.

Hugh. It was none of those you mention; no woman of these parts would cross the threshold where Cahal Bwee was holding his court.

Fr. W. Was it a strange woman from beyond the parish? Did any woman follow him at all?

Nora. He came lonely to the door and he went lonely from it.

Mrs G. On his own four bones he stole

in over my threshold and I not looking, and he falling with the fever.

Hugh. I was watching him and I can vouch for the same.

Fr. W. But there was a woman in your doorway. She drew aside and bent her head down as I passed in with the Sacrament. The place was ready, white and clean, and the candles lighting.

Mrs G. We are astray.

Fr. W. A woman with a sweet face, going about making no noise, speaking no words; her hands were white, and her feet, I think, were bare; and the poet's eyes followed her, struggling through the dark; and when I was finished and the agony was come upon him, he groaned, and groped with his hand at the darkness, and she rose from her knees and went across the room and took his hand into hers; and then his eyes closed quietly. . . . I came away, frightened, and stepping backwards. My people, I am afraid.

Nora. Will I shut the door, Father?

Hugh. 'Tis best to close it.

Fr. W. My people, I am afraid. It may have been no one of this world at all. We will all kneel down.

Mrs G. May God have mercy on us all.

[*The women kneel down.* Shawn *cries out in triumph within,* "*Hughie, Hughie!*" *and breaks in on them.*

Shawn (*coming quickly in; he doesn't see the* priest). Hughie! Hughie! Is he there at all to listen to me? I have every word of it pat on the tip of my tongue again. What would be said of Ulster if that song faded from the lips of man? Listen to me, all of ye, the ending of it:—

This bird, ye'll note, of the gentle throat,
'Twas of thirst he died when all is said——

Rise up, can't ye? What are you crying for, woman? Rise up to me——

'Twas of thirst he died when all is said,
Friends of my soul, come drain the bowl,
'Tis little ye'll drink and ye stretched out dead!

[Shawn *looks at them triumphantly.*

Fr. W. What wild song is he saying for us?

Hugh. 'Tis Cahal Bwee's song of the Yellow Bittern—God have mercy on his soul.

Fr. W. So 'tis.

Shawn (*coming forward*). I didn't see you, Father; you're welcome.

Hugh. Will I tell him, Father?—He was a great man for the poetry.

Fr. W. Cahal Bwee is dead! Pray for him.

Nora. He's deaf; he doesn't hear you.

Hugh (*shouting out*). Cahal Bwee MacElgunn is dead!

Shawn (*astonished*). Dead! Is it long he's dead? I never heard tell of it.

Hugh. He's lying dead in Sheela Gallagher's yonder.

Fr. W. And at rest; he died calmly.

Shawn. Can't ye speak up and enlighten me? Are ye telling me Cahal Bwee is lying dead in Sheela Gallagher's house?

Fr. W. He is dead in Sheela Gallagher's house, and his soul is at peace.

Shawn (*with wonder*). And what are ye doing here? Give me my stick.

[Nora *reaches him his stick; he makes for the door, opens it and steps out. Immediately he cries out in wild surprise:*

I'm dazzled! the road is lighting!

[*He falls down on his knees as if struck by lightning. A great light glows*

outside the door, passing by. A woman walks in it; her hands are joined and her face is very pale. The little crowd crouch on the floor, bending in deep reverence. After a moment of stillness:

Fr. W. (*whispering*). Queen of Angels,

Crowd (*whispering*). Pray for us.

Fr. W. Refuge of sinners,

Crowd. Pray for us.

Fr. W. Comfortress of the Afflicted,

Crowd. Pray for us.

[*There is now no light but that of the candle.*

CURTAIN

This play was performed for the first time by the Munster Players at Father Matthew's Hall, Cork, on the 10th May 1917, with the following cast:—

Shawn MacDonnell - -	*T. O'Hea*
Nora O'Neill - - -	*Madge Murray*
Hugh MacAleenan - -	*Parker K. Lynch*
Sheela Gallagher - -	*Bride Duggan*
Cahal Buidhe MacElgunn	*Finnbarr Murphy*
Father Walsh - - -	*J. Flynn*

(*The Play was produced by Parker K. Lynch.*)